

Whatever became of Mr. Citizen?

Dressed in ragged, grease-stained corduroys, I felt a little out of place in the Richland County office building — two floors of modest offices packed with political power (or so I'd heard). But I'd promised to attend a meeting of county council, and I presumed this was the place, though it was almost 4 p.m. and the hall outside the chambers was empty except for a young black sitting expectantly by the water cooler.

A Black militant, I thought, come to proselytize the members of council for their lack of sensitivity — but no, he was just looking for a job; waiting for The Man, who finally came out of his office, looked curiously at me (did I smell?) and said to the black guy, "Sorry, but I'm awfully busy today. Let me have your application, and we'll let you know . . ."

Alone. Occasional faces peered out from office doors. I pulled out my notebook and started scratching meaningless notes around telephone numbers in defense . . . "Hah, you clean people! I'm writing it all down . . . the secretary's insidious smile . . . the mod young politico's nasty sneer . . . it's all right here in my fat little notebook . . ."

Finally, the hall began to stir. Snickering came out of rooms where the smoke still lingered. People began to show up for the meeting, plump men in beautiful suits grabbing councilmen by the elbow: "Could I talk with you a minute . . . ? (looking towards me suspiciously) . . . somewhere private?"

More paranoia . . . there I was in the stronghold of Boss Tom Elliott, the man some folks described as the political machine's "chief engineer," a confidante of moonshiners, fat cats and power politicians . . . How deep is the Congaree River, I wondered . . . Is Elliott Italian? . . . Does he know any Italians? . . . more notes . . .

I heard familiar voices coming up the stairs: it was long-time civil rights activist Modjeska Simpkins and two companions, ready to raise a little weekly hell. Recognizing me as a reporter "from that fightin' newspaper," she gave me two posters; one was a quote and picture of Mother Jones, an unfashionable 19th century labor organizer in the West Virginia coal fields. Mother Jones smiles demurely in the photograph and the words read: Pray For The Dead And FIGHT LIKE HELL For The Living. Mrs. Simpkins liked that one a lot . . .

We filed into the tiny council chambers — about 25 seats for petitioners and the public, fronted by a long table for members of council and their assistants. A crowd was gathering as the T.V. newsmen began setting up their equipment with practiced motions, turning on hot lights, transforming the drab little room into a Genuine News Arena. When the T.V. cameras began whirring, the cubicle became a tiny theatre, a stage with dimension and meaning, where dedicated men carried out the serious business of government.

As the councilmen put on their camera faces, they chatted briefly with the electronic press, smiled obligingly, and made little quips about the quality of local news coverage . . . Councilman Son Grimsley nodded toward some petitioners: "Just tell them what you're protesting, and they'll put you on film."

After Chairman Green called the meeting to order, we stood and prayed. "Hallowed Be Thy Name," an anonymous minister intoned, "Thy Kingdom Come." I waited . . . but "Thy Will Be Done" never came . . . whose will? I wondered . . . "Lord, teach those who are ungrateful, impatient, and quick to criticize that all things come in Your Good Time" . . . Amen.

Mrs. Simpkins was first on the agenda. Two weeks before, she represented the Richland County Citizens' Committee at a news conference attacking the administration of Richland Memorial



Democracy at work: Rentz, Hope, Green, Louthian, Grimsley

Hospital. Six Columbia area social action agencies demanded a full-scale investigation by county council and requested a place on the council agenda. Now for fifteen minutes, she reviewed the charges made at the news conference—all-black departments headed by white supervisors, the hiring of 27 riot-equipped security guards, the release of \$500,000 in county medical indigent funds to the financially-crippled hospital without an audit — and as she talked, county attorney Frank Sloan kept time.

MRS. SIMPKINS: I see Mr. Sloan is keeping time . . .

SLOAN: That's my job . . . MRS. SIMPKINS: . . . so I'll just stop here and ask council if they have any questions or comments.

(SILENCE)

COUNCILMAN HOPE: Mrs. Simpkins . . . you said something about Council reducing funds to indigents . . . where did you get that information?

MRS. SIMPKINS: I think I read it in the newspapers.

COUNCILMAN HOPE: Well, you can't believe everything you read in the newspapers.

MRS. SIMPKINS: You're telling me . . . Everyone laughed. Then Son Grimsley asked Mrs. Simpkins if she meant there was discrimination in employment or in rendering of services. She replied, "Both."

No more questions. Mrs. Simpkins' portfolio of charges and documents were dismissed without promise of further action. In fact, most council members appeared unfamiliar with the nature of the charges . . . they listened respectfully and smiled knowingly at each other. Good old Mrs. Simpkins.

Another black, several generations younger, stood in the chamber doorway. He was Redfern II, leader of the Blacks United For Action, waiting to hear the outcome of a presentation made some weeks before — a color film depicting deteriorating sanitary conditions at the county's Roosevelt Village housing project. A quote came back to me from somewhere: "Man, you should have seen those honkies, wondering 'where'd that nigger get that color film?'"

County attorney Sloan reported to council that a "faculty sewer connection" at Roosevelt Village had been corrected and the dumpster service for removal of trash had been increased. "The sanitation department will check periodically to make sure it doesn't happen again," Sloan said. Redfern wandered off to another battle.

The whole question of moving to the old hospital facilities sparked a lively hour-long debate between the three-man majority and the two-man minority — underlining the

split between the two groups. Each of the Big Three played a special role. As chairman, Green was generally content to

Sitting through a County Council meeting quickly affirms a fact often reported in the daily press — the council is reigned over by a triumvirate of sorts, made up of Chairman John V. Green and councilmen Herbert Louthian and Stuart Hope. The two stragglers, Dr. Hunter Rentz and W.D. "Son" Grimsley sit at either end of the long table and even during the mundane business session, it is obvious they are out of the mainstream. The Big Three appear to have rehearsed everything beforehand . . . Green introduces a measure, Louthian puts it in the form of a motion, and Hope seconds it. Occasionally to relieve the boredom, Louthian and Hope exchange roles, with Hope forming the motion and Louthian seconding it . . . all very efficient.

Somewhere during this ceremony, a matter may come up which strikes Grimsley as questionable. He leans forward and asks almost apologetically, "Er, Mr. Chairman, could we discuss it a little bit?" Good country manners. One of the Big Three will slowly explain to Grimsley in condescending tones that the measure is sound and necessary, often adding, "I think the intent, Mr. Grimsley, was to protect Mr. Citizen." — the insinuation being, of course, that Grimsley can only oppose the measure if he is against Mr. Citizen.

Green particularly likes the sound "Mr. Citizen" makes in his mouth. As we listened to an extended debate involving the removal of county offices to the old Columbia Hospital facilities, Grimsley and Rentz expressed reservations about the hastiness of the move, while Green, Louthian and Hope offered various reasons why the move was imperative. At one point, Green ventured forth on what he apparently thought would be a telling point:

GREEN: As you all know, we have a serious parking problem around present county facilities. Mr. Sloan, you've looked into the matter of parking at the old Columbia Hospital. Won't we have more parking places there?

SLOAN: (hesitantly) Well . . . there are about 300 spaces on the grounds.

GREEN: Will there be enough parking for employees and Mr. Citizen?

SLOAN: (worriedly) Well, Mr. Haines has looked into the parking situation . . . (turning toward the back of the room) What about that, Mr. Haines? Will there be enough parking space?

HAINES: (matter-of-factly) No.

GREEN: (rising halfway out of his chair and pointing accusingly) What about Mr. Citizen, Mr. Haines? Where is Mr. Citizen going to park?

remain aloof; Hope was the great collator, the voice of reason attempting to bring everyone together; Louthian served as hatchetman, serving up biting attacks against Rentz and Grimsley. When the pair complained about inadequate information concerning the costs of the move, Louthian informed them that the county records were open and the information was there if they cared to get it. "I'd be ashamed to admit I was as uninformed as you gentlemen seem to be," Louthian said. When Rentz stated he was even more confused than he had been the week before, Louthian countered, "We'd better approve this measure now . . . by next week Mr. Rentz may be completely confused."

The actions of County Attorney Sloan during the debate clearly indicated which side he was on and served to further confirm the power base held by the Big Three. At various points during the meeting, Sloan would indicate he had taken such-and-such action and Rentz would ask on whose instructions he had taken the action. When Sloan replied he was ordered to do so by council, Rentz would say he couldn't remember any such orders. At one point, Rentz reminded council that no structural changes were to be made at the old hospital site until council took final action. "But I've been out there," Rentz said, "and they're already tearing down walls." Sloan admitted that a few "non-load bearing walls" had been torn down, but said that while the action may have been "a bit premature," he didn't see where any harm had been done. Earlier, during the discussion of the parking situation, Sloan told council that while there were only enough parking spaces for employees on the hospital grounds, there were "several hundred spaces" on the streets around the hospital, while in fact there are less than fifty.

From the beginning of the office debate, when Rentz moved for a delay, until the end when Hope presented a substitute motion, the machine rolled along on well oiled wheels. It was obvious from the start that Rentz and Grimsley were fighting another losing battle. As the arguments drew to a close, Green, Louthian, and Hope made careful speeches, drawing together all points in favor of the proposal, creating a fine delay between Rentz's delaying motion and the inevitable affirmative vote.

But though their attempts to keep the kangaroo flavor out of the proceedings were impressive, not many of the people present were fooled. One private citizen, obviously attending his first council meeting, turned and exclaimed in a loud whisper: "My God, they've got a conspiracy going here."

john norton

" . . . if you know in your own heart that you are smoking something that's going to cause you to separate from your family, to bring heartache on your parents . . . then it has to be habit-forming as hell for you to take the chance to do that . . . "

Continued

there would be a 50 dollar fine for possession."

"The only reason I'd like to see cases for possession tried in magistrate's court is that the general sessions court docket now is so overloaded. You would have time to concentrate on getting the harder pushers out of circulation instead of all these little old marijuana cases they've got up there now. It takes time to process these things . . ."

While Dennis is content to see possession of marijuana treated as a misdemeanor, he voiced the opinion that pushers should be punished more severely. He defined a pusher as "somebody who makes a living off his friends or his so-called friends; someone who introduces them to the drug, keeps them fed with it for a while free, and then starts charging them, and starts having parties, and starts making money off of his friends." When asked to clarify whether this definition of a pusher would apply to a person who sold only marijuana, Dennis replied, "Well I'm speaking of the same thing. There's no difference there. Not in my

opinion. No sir."

Dennis gave this explanation as to why he refused to be influenced by studies, such as the president's commission report, which advised the complete decriminalization of marijuana:

"I feel that I am in law enforcement, and I can see families broke up every day because a son, or somebody else, is strung out on a hard drug. Sometimes they get started with the marijuana issue . . ."

"It's like anything that's anti-marijuana never reaches the papers, never reaches any publicity. And I've heard people that I think are an authority on marijuana, like Edwin Bloomcris from Southern California and Tingleberry from California. These type of people are really up on marijuana because they've studied it for years and years. They know the drug scene itself. But this type of thing isn't even newsworthy anymore, unless it's pro-marijuana."

"Bloomcris wrote a book less than six months ago concerning marijuana and its effects. He wrote about two books. Real

good sellers. He took it back to the publisher and they said, 'Well this is anti-marijuana! And he said, 'Well that is exactly right. This is my findings.' They said; when you write something pro-marijuana, bring it back and we'll publish it. This is not what people want to read right now."

Dennis also offered an interesting comment for people who think that marijuana is not habit-forming. "Some people think that marijuana is not habit forming. They say, 'I can smoke it or I can leave it alone.' But, if you know in your own heart that you are smoking something that's going to cause you to separate from your family, to bring heartache on your parents, to get you kicked out of school, or possibly loose your job, or break up your home, then it has to be habit-forming as hell for you to take the chance to do that."

When asked what he thought about the drive to legalize marijuana, Dennis explained the complications that he foresees in such a move. "When we talk about legalizing marijuana, would you legalize the hashish? It's a byproduct of marijuana. It's hallucinogenic, a very hallucinogenic drug. And some of the marijuana that they smoke is a lot more hallucinogenic than other drugs. Some of it that's grown locally around here doesn't have much kick to it. If you smoke a lot of it, I guess you'd get on a

pretty good trip. But you get some from Jamaica or around Mexico, who's going to know? "I mean I'm convinced that even if marijuana is not more of a problem than alcohol, both of them are on the same level as far as problems are concerned. We certainly couldn't take another one like alcohol."

Fortunately, Dennis says that he knows that "marijuana is not as much of a problem to society as heroin." He adds, "I'm not saying that it's abused more than marijuana, and we certainly will concentrate more on the harder drugs than we will on marijuana. But we're not, not today or tomorrow or next year, going to turn our backs on people that are in violation of any drug law."

Obviously, Dennis and McLeese do not see eye-to-eye on the marijuana issue. So the busts for possession, use and sale of marijuana will continue in the city of Columbia as they have in the past. And, unless the drug commissioner is invested with some additional jurisdiction over the local narcotics police, he will remain only a spokesman for the narcotics division of the State Law Enforcement Department instead of becoming a drug commissioner capable of bringing about a realistic coordination of the state's drug control agencies.

Cinema

Continued

audience, he must applaud and be joyous or know when he should walk out in disapproval.

Enough people didn't walk out of the cabaret shows with their burlesque, scandal, and terrorism. No one has to walk out on "Cabaret". The film, in all its spectacle, cries to be heard and felt.

That art could come from Hitler is an irony hard to justify. But, if the world must suffer from the insanities of such men, thank God for people like Fosse, Minnelli, Grey, Allen, Ebb and Kander for putting these villains in a proper lighting.

Enjoy the gaiety of "Cabaret" but know that this "real life" gaiety spelled out death for millions of innocent people.

Michael Smith

Billy Jack

I really don't want to like this movie. In the first place, I'm really suspicious of films about The Indians or The War or The Negroes (especially from such a major studio as Warners) because they know it's hip & groovy and freaks will pay to see it, and you know that no Indian, movement coordinator, or Black will ever see a penny of the profits. American movie studios are financially desperate, and if they can rip off the movement, they will.

In the second place, I don't want to like it because it's a bad movie. Director John Frankenheimer hasn't learned a thing about

technique in the last 15 years, if indeed he ever knew anything — it's obvious, at any rate that he's never studied movies. There's no feeling of control here, no use of lighting or mood, none of the tricks our Priceless Cinema Heritage has taught us; it's completely push-the-button insensitive filmmaking. Beyond that, even the simple technicalities are bad: the camera shakes and loses focus, the dubbing of the song is too obvious, etc.' But the damn movie succeeds anyway; with absolutely nothing else going for it it succeeds on story line alone. Billy Jack is a half-breed and a war hero, protecting an Indian free school against the snippy, bigoted townspeople — but the main tenet of the school is pacifism, and by defending his people with violence he is betraying their cause. The conflict is truly moving, not punky-hippie-groovy, not just a vehicle for a young filmmaker's fooling around. And the viewer's involvement grows as insults lead to violence, and more violence leads to death, ending with Billy Jack staked out in a cabin surrounded by police. The love interest, is the most sincere I've seen in a movie in a long time — an unspoken love between Billy Jack and the Indian woman who runs the school. The great thing about her — besides her strength and dignity in the face of horror and humiliation — is that she's old, she's not a little bouncy Indianette in a short beaded skirt, she's a real woman. I didn't expect the Warner Brothers to admit they existed.

It's a good movie — if you missed it the first time don't miss it this time. But don't go expecting good filmmaking, it's a lousy movie, but is it ever a great movie.

Frederica Green

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